

The Fate of Manuscripts in Iraq and Elsewhere

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In this well informed article, Dr Geoffrey Roper, an expert in the field, outlines an impressive portrait of the dangers and threats encountered by the national heritage of Iraq due to the dramatic recent events in this country. After an historical survey in which the 13th-century Mongol invasion is recorded, the article focuses on the vicissitudes that the tragic political and military situation in Iraq has inflicted on manuscripts, archives, rare books and libraries in different towns of Iraq, especially in Baghdad.

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1. History of Iraq's Creativity as Revealed by Manuscript Production

Even in the earliest period of Islam, Iraq assumed a leading role in the production of written texts. The city of Kufa, which was founded as its administrative capital in 17 H/638 CE, was in the first two centuries a major centre of scholarly writing and played a crucial part in the development of written Arabic. It gave its name to a monumental style of script, Kufic, characteristic both of early Qur'an manuscripts and of many inscriptions on buildings [1].

(http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/iraqi_manuscript_of_the_Quran_by_Ahmad_al_Bakri_Fig_1.JPG)

Figure 1: Iraqi manuscript of the Quran, from Baghdad, written by Ahmad Ibn al-Suhrawardi al-Bakri in 706 H. Page Size 35x47 cm. (Source (http://illuminationart.net/new_page_1.htm)).

Basra too played an important part in this early period. It saw the first flowering of Arabic prose literature and the birth of Arabic grammatical writing, and was a major centre of Umayyad and early 'Abbasid poetry. A number of important libraries developed there, most notably that founded by Ibn Sawwār for his *Dār al-'Ilm* (House of Learning) in the 4th century H/10th century CE. This was one of the earliest *waqf* (endowed) libraries [2].



(http://www.MuslimHeritage.com/uploads/Compendium_of_tales_by_al_Hariri_of_Basra_Fig_2.JPG)

Figure 2: Miniature from one of the greatest Arabic illuminated manuscripts, a compendium of tales by al-Hariri of Basra (446-516 A.H. / 1054-1122) illustrated by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti: The *Maqamat* (Assemblies). Paris, Bibl. Nat., MS arabe 5847. (Source (<http://www.omifacsimiles.com/brochures/maq.html>)).

But of course it was Baghdad which really made Muslim and Arab literary and scientific culture the most important in the world for some four centuries after it became the capital of the 'Abbasid caliphate in the 2nd century H/8th century CE. There was an enormous output of manuscript texts there in nearly all the human and physical sciences. The 10th-century Baghdad bookseller and bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm listed some 4300 authors whose writings were available there in his time. Works in philosophy and natural sciences, some translated from ancient Greek, others original, were especially important later in the revival of secular knowledge and reasoning in Europe, as well as in the Muslim world. Others were exquisite works of art – especially the Qur'ān manuscripts by such masters as Ibn al-Bawwāb. But the texts also included more personal documents, such as the manuscript diary of the 11th-century Baghdad historian Ibn al-Bannā' al-Hanbalī, of which a fragment has survived in Damascus [3].



(http://www.MuslimHeritage.com/uploads/Arabic_translation_of_Materia_Medica_of_Dioscorides_Fig_3.JPG)

Figure 3: Miniature from an Arabic translation of the *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides ("The Pharmacy"), dated 1224, Iraq, Baghdad School. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Burnett Collection (57.51.21) ([Source](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/07/wam/ho_57.51.21.htm) (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/07/wam/ho_57.51.21.htm)).

But these manuscript books were not just produced and read: they were also kept and assembled in libraries where whole communities of scholars could consult them. The historian Youssef Eche identified some 83 of them, in Baghdad alone, which are described or mentioned in contemporary sources [4]. They ranged from the original *Bayt al-Hikma* (House of Wisdom), which flourished at the height of the 'Abbasid caliphate, to the later *madrasa* libraries of the Seljuks, the most famous of which were the Nizāmīya and the Mustansiriya. There were also numerous private

libraries owned by individuals, but often made available to others [5].

2. The Tragedy of the Mongol Invasion and later losses

Mediaeval Baghdad was therefore an immense storehouse of knowledge in written form. But if it was justly celebrated for the creation of its collections, it subsequently became notorious for their destruction. Already in 451 H / 1059 CE, the conquering Seljuks burnt and pillaged the illustrious Dār al-'Ilm (House of Knowledge) of Sābūr ibn Ardashīr, destroying or dispersing its entire holdings estimated at 10,000 volumes [6].

Then in 1258 CE came the event that has gone down in history and legend as the worst catastrophe ever to befall Muslim civilisation and literary culture. The Mongols under Hülegü Khan captured Baghdad, slaughtered the Caliph and large numbers of the population, and set fire to much of the city. The libraries were ransacked and, according to Ibn Khaldūn, most of their contents were thrown into the river Tigris [7]. Legend has it that the river flowed black with ink for days afterwards. Al-Qalqashandī confirmed that all the books in the Caliphal libraries perished at the hands of the invaders, and all traces of them and of the knowledge contained within them were obliterated [8]. They did much the same in other Iraqi cities, such as Mosul.

The totality of the destruction, however, has been somewhat exaggerated. In the first place, many manuscripts from the pre-Mongol period did survive. In Baghdad, although the Caliphal collections perished, other important libraries, such as those of the Nizāmīya and the Mustansiriya, were not destroyed and continued to be used until much later [9].

What seems to have happened is that the disaster of 1258 has become emblematic of a destruction and decline in Muslim literary culture and resources which in fact occurred over a much longer period. Here is a list of some other library disasters which took place before the fall of Baghdad.

Library	Mode of destruction	Date (CE)
Córdoba, library of Al-Hakam	Selectively burnt and buried Remainder sold & plundered	Ca.980 11 th century
Rayy Library	Selectively burnt	1027
Baghdad – Dār al-'Ilm of Sābūr	Burnt & pillaged	1059
Cairo - Fatimid Dār al-'Ilm	Partially dispersed and bindings used for shoe-leather Remainder auctioned	1068-1171
Tripoli (Lebanon) – Banū 'Ammār	Burnt by Crusaders	1109
Nishapur	Burnt	1153
Ghazna	Burnt	1155
Marw (Merv)	Sacked	1209

Table: Examples of libraries that were destroyed or damaged [10].

After 1258, Baghdad and the other Iraqi cities became provincial rather than metropolitan centres, and this was true of book production as well. Nevertheless, manuscripts continued to be written, and libraries existed. After the Mongol rulers converted to Islam, they themselves became patrons of learning and writing. In 14th-century Mosul, for instance, fine scientific manuscripts were produced, as well as magnificent Qur'āns commissioned by the Mongol Sultans themselves. However, the Iraqi lands never regained their previous eminence. As Mongol power disintegrated, various minor dynasties gained and lost control, such as the Kara Koyunlu or Black Sheep dynasty. Their tenure of Baghdad and other Iraqi cities was fairly ruinous, but even they

patronised scribes and painters such as the producers of a group of illustrated Persian manuscripts in the mid-15th century [11]. The fate of these epitomises what befell many Iraqi manuscripts in the next four centuries. Most of them are now in Istanbul, where they were taken, along with many other Iraqi manuscripts, after the Ottomans conquered Iraq in 1534. One of them, however, is in the British Library in London. The Ottoman period was generally one of decline and neglect of the public and private libraries, which rendered them vulnerable to those, both Turkish and European, who wished to remove their contents in order to enhance their own collections elsewhere.

This was true even of works produced in Iraq by the Ottomans themselves. There was a thriving school of miniature painting in Ottoman Baghdad: but the examples listed by Rachel Milstein, in her study of the subject, are located in various collections in Germany, Sweden, the USA, Israel, France, Great Britain, Ireland and Kuwait, as well as Turkey [12].

A group of local histories of Baghdad in Arabic and Turkish, written in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, is now dispersed in manuscript copies located in London, Berlin, New York, Kazan, Istanbul, Cairo, Mecca and Medina, although a number of copies do (or did) remain in Iraq [13]. Interestingly, however, one of them, the *Gulshan-i hulafa'* (Gulshan-i Khulafā') of Murtaza Nazmi-zade, was taken to Istanbul to be printed at the press of the first Muslim printer, İbrahim Müteferrika, where it appeared in 1730 [14]. This showed the first signs of an awareness that the way to make texts accessible, and to ensure their preservation, is indeed to print them and publish them in hundreds or thousands of copies. There are too many important texts in Muslim languages that are still waiting for this to happen.

3. The Dispersal and Consolidation of Iraqi Collections in the 19th and 20th Centuries

In the 19th century, Europeans began to take a serious interest in Iraq, or Mesopotamia as they called it, and significant quantities of Iraqi antiquities were shipped to Europe and took their place in private and public collections. These included manuscripts. A good example of those who did this was the Englishman Claudius James Rich, who was appointed British Resident in Baghdad in 1808 and travelled extensively in most regions of Iraq until his withdrawal in 1821. He acquired there nearly 1000 manuscript volumes in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Syriac. These were sent back to England, and after his death were purchased by the British Museum for its library, which is now the British Library. This quantity may not seem very high, compared with the tens of thousands of manuscripts left in Iraq, but we must bear in mind that Rich, and other collectors like him, chose their acquisitions with care, removing only those of great historical or artistic importance. So the written legacy of the country was in effect creamed off, with many of the choicest items enriching European libraries. It is indeed ironic that in 2003 the British Government intervened to stop the export from Britain of some of Rich's own letters and diaries, so that they could be acquired by the British Library. If such a ban had been in force in the Ottoman Empire, then Rich himself could not have sent out his choice acquisitions of manuscripts from Baghdad.

The rights and wrongs of this process have been much debated. On the one hand, Iraq and other Arab and Muslim countries, lost an important part of their historical and literary resources, which was removed beyond the immediate reach of local scholars and readers. This can only have had an adverse effect on the development of the national culture and historical awareness, as well as being in itself an historic injustice arising from the imbalance of economic and social power at a particular moment in time. On the other hand, these manuscripts were thereby placed in safe-keeping, and preserved from further destruction and decay in their homeland. They were also in most cases made available, in a systematic way, to scholars and researchers from around the world, who would have had much greater difficulty consulting them in Iraqi libraries.

Later, however, in the 20th century, the practice grew of wealthy collectors buying individual leaves of dismembered manuscripts, especially those notable for painting or calligraphy: some of these remained in private hands, others eventually joined public collections. For instance, there is a fine decorated Qur'ān produced in Baghdad in the late 'Abbasid period, which survived the Mongol invasion. One leaf was offered for sale in London recently; others from the same manuscript are scattered in a variety of libraries and private collections elsewhere. So while it may survive, at least in part, its integrity as a book and a work of art has been lost.

The presence of Syriac among the groups of manuscripts collected by Rich reminds us that Iraq's literary heritage is not just Muslim. The Christians there also produced many works, historical and scientific as well as religious, not only in Syriac, but also in Arabic and some in Armenian. Joseph Habbi in 1997 identified 28 collections in Iraqi monastic and church libraries, as well as 16 private collections there [15]. The Iraqi Jewish community also produced many manuscripts in Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic. Some of the best Christian and Jewish manuscripts likewise found their way to European and American collections. In the 1920s, for instance, the Christian scholar Alphonse Mingana, himself of Iraqi origin, acquired and took away many Syriac and Arabic manuscripts from Iraq and neighbouring countries on behalf of his patron, the chocolate magnate and missionary enthusiast Edward Cadbury [16]. They are now in the University of Birmingham.

Still, tens of thousand of manuscripts did remain in Iraq, and after the country's emergence as an independent state in the 20th century, they began to be organised into public collections and libraries. In 1923 the new national museum was inaugurated in Baghdad and was installed in a permanent building in 1926. This subsequently became the central repository of a large portion of the country's manuscript collections, until a separate national manuscripts library was created in 1988. In 1928 the Public Awqāf Library was formed from nine separate endowed collections dating from the Ottoman period, and numerous others were added in the following decades [17]. Other public and academic libraries were also created elsewhere in Iraq, in which manuscripts were deposited.

By the second half of the 20th century most Arab and Muslim countries had reorganised and safeguarded their collections in similar ways, and the future of surviving manuscripts, both there and elsewhere, seemed assured. It was thought that the wholesale destruction or loss of such collections was now unthinkable – something that had happened only in earlier, less enlightened times.

4. The Looting and Loss of Islamic Manuscripts in the Late 20th Century

The last decade of the century brought a rude and tragic awakening. In 1990 Iraq occupied Kuwait, and removed valuable and recently formed collections of manuscripts from the Sabāh collection, among others, to Baghdad. In the process some disappeared and subsequently appeared on the market in London and elsewhere. Most, however, were recovered and restored to Kuwait after the end of the occupation. Meanwhile, some Iraqi provincial museums were looted during the chaos and uprising following the Gulf War of 1991. According to a report compiled by a Japanese mission in 1996 on behalf of the Iraqi government and UNESCO, the missing items included 364 Arabic manuscripts looted from the Kirkuk Museum [18]. These were stated to be from Dār Saddām, which was the central manuscripts library in Baghdad. They were evacuated from Baghdad to Kirkuk before the 1991 war and then stolen from there, although they were later recovered.

Islamic manuscripts were to suffer a much worse fate elsewhere during the 1990s. In Bosnia in 1992, Serbian forces deliberately targeted the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo with incendiary shells and succeeded in burning it to the ground. Its entire collection of 5263 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Bosnian and Hebrew was destroyed, together with even greater numbers of Ottoman documents and registers [19]. Although some attempt has since been made to restore some items in the form of microfilm copies held elsewhere, the loss remains irreparable. The suspicion must be that the Serbs were motivated by sectarian and nationalist hatred to try to eradicate as much as possible of the Bosnian Muslim literary, historical and scholarly heritage – an act which might be called cultural genocide. Fortunately, the other main collection, in the Gazi Husrev Library, was saved by being transferred to a shelter. Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation in London subsequently rendered valuable assistance to its conservation, cataloguing and digitisation.

Similar attacks and destruction were inflicted on a number of other Muslim libraries and archives in Mostar and elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina, resulting in further significant losses of manuscript holdings.

In 1999 there was conflict in Kosova, also formerly part of Yugoslavia. There the manuscript libraries and historic archives of the Islamic Community of Kosova (KBI) were likewise targeted by Serbs, as well as other important collections, including mosque and other *waqf* libraries which were destroyed by fire or bombardment. Hundreds of manuscripts in Arabic, Turkish and Albanian were destroyed. In at least one case, where bombardment and fire had failed, manuscripts were destroyed by hand, their pages being ripped from the bindings, torn and smeared with dirt and excrement [20].

Another Muslim country racked by conflict in this period was Afghanistan. Here too, manuscript collections sustained severe losses. The Taliban regime destroyed many manuscripts of which it disapproved, especially those from the Persian literary and artistic tradition. Academic and other libraries were looted in the periods of chaos, many valuable manuscripts left the country and collectors in Europe and America snapped them up. It is reckoned that the illegal trade in antiquities, including manuscripts, at one stage even approached that in illicit drugs [21].

5. The Tragedy of Iraqi Manuscripts in 2003

Hopes were that the new millennium would bring a restoration of civilised values in the world. Unfortunately, however, since 2001 a new ruthlessness has asserted itself, which has been manifested especially in Iraq. The illegal invasion of that country in March 2003 has brought a new disaster to its manuscript heritage. The exact scale of the disaster is still not fully known, but an approximate picture can be sketched from available reports of eyewitnesses and subsequent investigators [22].

Synopsis of Events (2003)

- Thursday 20 March: American & British forces invaded the country
- By Saturday 5 April, the American forces reached Baghdad.
- By Wednesday 9 April, they controlled all the main areas of the city, and they asserted the reality of their conquest by organising the famous demolition of a large statue of Saddām Husayn in one of the main squares, in front of the television cameras.
- On the next four days, 9-12 April, there was large-scale and apparently systematic looting of the Iraq Museum, one of the world's greatest museums of antiquities.
- On 14 April the Awqāf Library (Library of Religious Endowments), already mentioned above, was pillaged and burnt.
- On the same day, the National Library and Archives were looted and set on fire. About a week later, they were raided again, and suffered further destruction by fire and theft.
- Meanwhile, important research libraries in the Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) and the Iraqi Academy of Sciences were likewise plundered and/or torched, as was that of the Mustansirīya University. Several Government Ministerial archives were also ransacked.
- The American occupation forces controlling the city failed to stop this plundering and destruction, in spite of their obligations under international law to protect cultural property.
- Outside Baghdad, University and Public libraries in the towns of Mosul in the north and Basra in the south likewise suffered more or less serious damage.
- The condition of MSS libraries and archives in other localities is still not really known, even now.

Missions

When news of these disasters reached scholars and librarians elsewhere, there was considerable outrage, mingled in some cases with guilt. The Arab Regional Branch of the International Council of Archives issued a statement on 16 April 2003, proclaiming "The catastrophe of the Iraqi civilization" and calling on the governments of the USA and UK, as well as their relevant academic institutions, "to strictly enforce the preservation of the great heritage of Iraq until it is vested in the trustful hands of the Iraqi scholars and intellectuals".

In the West, organisations and groups scrambled to send missions of inquiry and offer help. Most attention focused on the plight of the Iraq Museum and archaeological sites, but libraries and archives were not entirely neglected, despite their lower profile in the media. On 5 May UNESCO sent the Venezuelan poet and historian of book destruction Fernando Baez to Baghdad to investigate the fate of libraries and archives there, but his report, despite being a literary tour de force, added hardly anything to what had already been reported by journalists.

On 25 May the Iraqi-American scholar Nabil al-Tikriti visited Baghdad, acting partly on behalf of the North American Middle East Librarians Association and the University of Chicago. His report yielded useful information on the state of the five main MSS collections there, although some particulars were contradicted by later reports; for other institutions he relied mainly on hearsay.

The following month an international team of four scholars constituting what they called "The Iraqi Observatory" – the social observatory being a French concept – spent 8 days in Baghdad. Their report, while broader in its remit, has an important section on libraries, concentrating on the National Library & Archives, the Awqāf Library, and the Qādirīya mosque library. This is especially useful because the French scholar Edouard Méténier, who wrote it, had extensive knowledge and experience of Baghdad libraries from before the war.

UNESCO sent a mission of inquiry into museums and libraries in May 2003, but their designated library expert, Jean-Marie Arnoult of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, was denied a visa by the American authorities. Later, however, they relented, and M. Arnoult eventually arrived on 27 June, staying until 6 July. His detailed report was published jointly with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), and includes much useful information

as well as detailed recommendations. He visited four libraries in Baghdad as well as the National Archives, and unlike other missions, he also went to the University and Public libraries in both Mosul and Basra.

Later the US Library of Congress also sent a mission, 27 October - 3 November 2003, which visited the National Library and the main MSS Library in Baghdad. This was under the auspices of the Cultural Property Office of the US Department of State Mission to Baghdad, and made detailed recommendations to the Ministry of Culture in the occupation regime concerning the future of those institutions. Several of its findings contradict what was reported by the earlier missions.

Unfortunately none of these missions seems to have been coordinated at all with the others. Some of them have overlapped, and some of their findings have contradicted each other [23].

6. The State of Iraqi Manuscripts and Collections after the Invasion

Let us now look at some of the individual libraries and institutions holding manuscripts.

6.1. Iraq Museum

The looting of the Museum, and the contradictory reports and claims concerning it, have been covered extensively in the media, and in reports from museum specialists and archaeologists [24]. So they will not be discussed here, except to note two points of relevance to manuscripts:

1. Many of the antiquities stolen were not *just* works of art or archaeological objects, but also embodied *texts* -- in fact some of the earliest written texts known to mankind. So they are, in a sense, manuscripts, although written on clay and stone, rather than parchment or paper.
2. It was been reported in several places that *Islamic manuscripts* were lost from the Museum. This is a misunderstanding arising from the fact that the Museum formerly held important collections of such MSS, and published catalogues of them [25]. All of them were, however, transferred in 1988 to a separate library, called the Saddam MSS Library, the contents of which were saved from destruction. The US Army investigator into the Museum thefts, Colonel Bogdanos, several times triumphantly announced at press conferences, and in reports, that his team had located these MSS, which he stated were taken from the Museum, and that they would be returned there in due course. He moreover added the number of these MSS - about 40,000 - to his figure of museum objects successfully recovered. In fact they did not belong to the Museum, and had not been there for more than 19 years.

6.2. National Library and Archives

The National Library met a far worse fate than the Museum, although it received less attention in the media. The collections suffered severely, but, contrary to some ill-informed reports, they did not include manuscript volumes.

http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/Facade_National_Library_National_Archives_Baghdad_Fig_4.JPG

The National Archives were housed in the same building as the Library, and suffered much more from deliberate fire damage. According to the Library of Congress report, archives of the Ba'thist period were especially targeted, and almost completely destroyed; likewise the microfilm collection. Papers from earlier periods, however, may have been saved, either in the building or elsewhere; but there is conflicting evidence about this. It seems from the Library of Congress report that over 30,000 important Ottoman and later documents were removed to the basement of the Board of Tourism, which was unfortunately flooded by a burst water main shortly afterwards. The documents were retrieved, but have been seriously damaged by water and mould.

More recently the National Library and Archives have seen a remarkable revival, reorganisation and return to use, in the face of great difficulties, under its dynamic and visionary Director-General, Dr Saad Eskander, appointed at the end of 2003. But the losses can never be made good.

6.3. Dār Al-Makhtūtāt Al-'Irāqīya (Iraqi Centre For Manuscripts)

As already mentioned, the principal national collection of MSS in Iraq is the Iraqi Centre for Manuscripts (*Dār al-Makhtūtāt al-'Irāqīya*), formerly known as the Saddam Manuscripts Library (*Dār Saddam li-l-makhtūtāt*). As well as the former Museum collections, it contains many other private and mosque collections which have been centralised or appropriated by the government since 1988. It now totals over 40,000 MSS, and is one of the more important Islamic MSS collections in the world. Fortunately, it was saved from theft or destruction by the diligence and foresight of its director, Usāma al-Naqshabandī, who arranged for the entire collection, together with some others from elsewhere, to be transferred to a bomb shelter in western Baghdad in December 2002, when war seemed imminent. The local population were enlisted to guard them, and they remained there, stored in trunks in controlled temperature and atmospheric conditions. However, the Library of Congress mission found traces of some damage from handling and insect infestation. Obviously the conditions were far from ideal, and they needed be returned to normal storage and access as soon as possible. Unfortunately the main building of the MSS library had been looted and much equipment stolen, so this collection remained for five years in the bunker, while divisions and rivalries between government departments prevented any decision on where they should go.

http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/Manuscripts_Iraqi_Centre_Manuscripts_storage_bomb_shelter_2003_Fig_5.JPG

Eventually it was reported in March 2008 that these manuscripts had been returned to the Iraq Museum, despite alternative proposals for them to be housed in the National Library.

6.4. Awqāf Library

What happened to the second most important MSS collection, however, was much more serious. This is the Central



(http://www.MuslimHeritage.com/uploads/Carbonised_folios_Awqaf_Library_2003_Fig_6.JPG)

Figure 6: Carbonised folios from the Central Awqāf Library, May 2003. ([Source \(http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/LibraryPix/005.html\)](http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/LibraryPix/005.html)).

Library of Awqāf, that is, Religious Endowments, holding over 6000 MS volumes in Arabic, Turkish and Persian, containing about 7500 texts.

This was looted and set on fire on 14 April 2003: the *Independent* journalist Robert Fisk wrote at the time that he saw flames about 30 metres high bursting from the windows.

We know most of what this library contained; it was comprehensively catalogued by 'Abd Allāh al-Jubūrī, and his catalogue was published in 1973-74 [26]. He also wrote a history of the Library, published in 1973 [27]. Since then, several important collections have been added to the Library.

Among the volumes were 43 fine calligraphic copies of the Qur'ān and many rare and old copies of works on *Hadīth*, geography and history. Among the rare and unique texts are:

- the earliest extant copy of the celebrated *Hadīth* commentary by Ibn Qutayba, copied in Wāsit in Iraq in 472 H/1079 CE.
- an important geographical work on the Arabian peninsula by Al-Hasan Lughda al-Isfahānī, which contains the oldest detailed description of parts of the Hijaz and the Islamic Holy Places.
- another rare work on *Hadīth* by Abū 'l-Thana' Mahmūd al-Dimashqī, copied in 767 H/1365 CE for the Mamluk Sultan Barqūq.

There are, or were, also many other unique texts, some of them many centuries old. But age is not the only criterion. The Library contained many more recent texts of unique historical importance. For instance, the Library held a manuscript containing two important unpublished texts by the celebrated 19th-century writer Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, one a criticism of the Christian Gospels, the other on the connection between Islam and modern civilisation. Fortunately the first had been microfilmed or photocopied, and was published in Amman in 2003. But the other has never been properly studied, only mentioned in passing by historians and biographers. Now it may be lost forever.

(http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/Central_Awqaf_Library_burnt_out_interior_2003_Fig_7.JPG)

There is conflicting testimony as to how many of these MSS, and the rare printed books also held by the library, have been saved. At first it was thought that they had all gone. But in late May 2003, Nabil al-Tikriti, who visited the library, was told that most of them had been put in safe storage, some in the Qādirīya mosque library, and some in an undisclosed location. But apparently - so he was told - those in the Qādirīya had been returned soon after, because of an incident there involving the killing of one of their armed guards by the Americans. These were then either stolen or perished in a second arson attack. On the other hand, the later Iraqi Observatory report said that the wardens of the Qādirīya had denied that any Awqāf MSS were ever there.

Arnoult's report for UNESCO estimated that losses amounted to about 40% of the MSS and 90% of the printed books. But in June 2004 Zayn al-Naqshabandī, the Iraqi historian, archivist and bookseller, issued a report, said to have been signed by Salāh Karīm Husayn, Director of the Library, that 1477 MSS were stolen, and 5000 remained. If so, the losses were less than originally feared. But since these figures do not tally with the totals thought to have been held by the Library, and the report also mentions 60,300 "books" destroyed by fire, without saying whether any of them were manuscripts, the position remains quite unclear. Such is the confusion surrounding the fate of Iraqi MSS collections after the invasion of 2003.

6.5. Bayt al-Hikma

Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) is a semi-private centre supporting research in the arts and humanities. It was completely burned and looted. It is located right next to the Ministry of Defence, on the site of a 13th-century *madrasa* (school). Its collection was relatively small, holding only about 100 manuscripts. But they included a 9th-century Qur'ān, a 12th-century copy of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī, an Ibn Sīnā philosophy text, and a 19th-century manuscript of al-Alūsī concerning Baghdad. This entire collection was lost – and there were no microfilms or microfiche copies. It is unclear whether they were stolen or burnt.

(http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/Bayt_al_Hikma_burnt_out_interior_2003_Fig_8.JPG)

6.6. Academy of Sciences

The Iraqi Academy was also attacked. Fortunately most of its manuscripts had already been transferred to the Iraqi Centre for Manuscripts, but there were thirty on the premises at the time, of which 20 were lost. It is thought that these were mainly Syriac manuscripts.

(http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/Iraqi_Academy_Sciences_looted_manuscript_room_2003_Fig_9.JPG)

6.7. Elsewhere

Outside Baghdad, libraries in Mosul and Basra were also severely damaged, including the University and Public Libraries. All these held manuscript collections, but there seem to be no specific and reliable reports on their fate. One can only fear the worst.

In the years following the invasion, there were reports of damage to libraries during fighting and disturbances in Nāsiriya and Najaf under the occupation. In the latter place especially, there was heavy bombardment of the old city in 2004. This contained important historic libraries of manuscripts; but we do not know what damage, if any, they suffered.

7. Recommendations

It is appropriate to conclude by considering what can be done to prevent such disasters happening again. Here are some brief recommendations:

- We must continually urge governments to respect international law. Obviously this means not engaging in illegal wars and invasions in the first place, but more specifically it means observing the existing international conventions on the protection of cultural property. Destruction of libraries is a crime against humanity and a violation of, among others, the 1931 Athens Charter, the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1964 Venice Charter, and the 1977 Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The failure of occupying powers to prevent such destruction, as happened in Iraq, is itself a violation of these conventions.
- We must redouble our efforts to catalogue and conserve manuscripts, so that we know what exists, and take steps to preserve it.
- We must support and encourage the photographing of manuscripts, digitally and on film, so that their destruction does not result in the irretrievable loss of texts. But at the same time we must emphasise their importance as historic physical objects which must be safeguarded.
- We must try as hard as possible to intercept stolen manuscripts which may appear in private collections, or be offered for sale. The Middle East Librarians Association of North America has tried to assist in this by publishing on the Internet examples of pages containing the seals and library stamps known to belong to Iraqi libraries [28]. But everybody who handles manuscripts must be continually vigilant.
- We must above all create a climate of opinion, both inside and outside the Muslim world, which will not tolerate such destruction or dispersal of the intellectual heritage of any nation or culture. Such a climate is already beginning to emerge in relation to antiquities and museum objects: we must ensure that it applies equally to the books and manuscripts which embody the very essence of human knowledge, thought and civilisation.

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End Notes

[1] Djaït in EI² 1986, pp.350-351; Pedersen 1984, pp. 79-82; Safadi 1978, pp. 10-13.

[2] Eche 1967, pp. 100-102.

[3] Makdisi 1956.

[4] Eche 1967, *passim*.

[5] Pinto 1929.

[6] Mackensen 1932, pp.288-290; Eche 1967, pp. 116-117.

[7] *Kitāb al-'Ibar wa-dīwān al-mubtada'*, Book III, cited in Eche 1967, p. 199.

[8] Qalqashandī, *Subh al-A'shā*, Cairo 1913-22, Vol. I, p. 466.

[9] Footnotes by Krenkow in his translation of Pinto 1929; Mackensen 1932, p. 297.

[10] Main source: Olga Pinto, "The libraries of the Arabs during the time of the Abbasides". Translated by F. Krenkow. *Islamic Culture* 3 (1929), pp. 234-239.

[11] Stchoukine 1972, *passim*.

[12] Milstein 1990, *passim*.

[13] Niewöhner-Eberhard 1979, *passim*.

[14] Ibid., p. 485.

[15] Habbi 1998.

[16] Hunt [1997].

[17] Jubūrī 1973, I p. 4.

[18] Fuji & Oguchi 1996, p. viii.

[19] Riedlmayer 1995.

[20] Riedlmayer 1999.

[21] Abram 2005, p.14; Knuth 2006, pp. 144-151.

[22] These reports are listed, and in most cases their full texts are provided, on the web-page of the Committee on Iraqi Libraries of the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA) at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html> (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html>) This page also provides links to a number of distressing photographic images of destroyed books and library buildings.

[23] The texts of the reports of most of these missions can be found and compared at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html> (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html>) (see note 23 above).

[24] For extensive documentation and discussion, see the IraqCrisis web pages of the Oriental Institute in Chicago, at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/iraq.html> (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/iraq.html>).

[25] Naqshabandī 1993, pp. 19-25.

[26] Jubūrī 1973-74.

[27] Jubūrī 1969.

[28] See: [Middle East Librarians Association Committee on Iraqi Libraries Home Page](http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html) (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html>), [Iraqi Library Stamps](http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/LibraryStamps/LibraryStamps.htm) (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/LibraryStamps/LibraryStamps.htm>) (October 2003).

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